

The News of Lithuania, But With Kremlin Spin

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

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MOSCOW, April 10 — When it comes to reporting on the situation in Lithuania, Soviet news organizations have reverted to the one-sided, polemical style of the pre-glasnost era.

Some intellectuals who have benefited from President Mikhail S. Gorbachev's encouragement of greater openness now fear that it may be taken away from them under the pressures of ethnic separatism and economic decline.

As an example, such critics point to the nationwide evening television news program "Vremya," which has been bending over backward to cover the opposition to the independence movement in Lithuania, where the newly elected Parliament, led by President Vytautas Landsbergis, proclaimed sovereignty on March 11.

"They're not reporting," a Russian philosophy professor said as the program began on Saturday night. "They're preaching at us."

Report on Vilnius Rally

After showing scenes from a pro-independence rally in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, that was said to have attracted 300,000 people, the "Vremya" correspondent, Aleksandr Barkhatov, briefly interviewed a demonstrator who said he did not feel that there could be freedom in Lithuania without full independence. Mr. Barkhatov said Soviet Army loudspeaker trucks and a helicopter that dropped leaflets on the crowd were the only attempts to provide an opposing point of view, and he read the contents of one of the leaflets before the camera.

Then followed a three-minute interview with the deputy director of the Committee of Citizens of the U.S.S.R. in Lithuania, Gennadi S. Tarasov, who complained that while Mr. Landsbergis said he wanted a calm and reasoned dialogue with the Soviet authorities, the new Lithuanian Government would require residents to sign loyalty oaths to get identity cards. "I won't sign this, but I'm staying," he said. "I'll be a second-class citizen."

Eduard M. Sagalaye, chief editor of Soviet television's news programs, said in an interview Monday that he recognized that "Vremya" did not give a balanced picture. "We'd like it to be, but there is pressure from the Government, from the military, from the Communist Party Central Committee," he said. "Not from the President, but now that things have calmed down perhaps the pressure will ease and we can be more objective."

No Formal Censorship

He said that there was no formal censorship, something that a new law on the press being discussed by the Supreme Soviet in Moscow this week will ban, and off-beat news shows like the weekly "Vzglyad" program sometime take a tack quite different from "Vremya." But the "pressure" apparently affects others as well.

The official Soviet press agency Tass, reporting from Vilnius on Saturday about a Lithuanian proclamation encouraging young people to refuse the Soviet draft on May 4, clearly took sides against resisting induction.

Tass said many families of future draftees had been "at a loss" to understand the proclamation. "One cannot but take into consideration the fact that many republican newspapers, radio and television are going hand in hand with the Sajudis leaders and are giving one-sided coverage of events in Lithuania," it said.

Last week, the television news coverage from Vilnius, from which foreign correspondents are now barred by the Soviet authorities, consisted largely of strikes by ethnic Russians opposed to

Lithuanian independence. Lithuanian spokesmen said that participation in the protests was low and that they had little effect on the situation.

In the 1979 census, the latest for which data are available, 80 percent of Lithuania's 3.39 million people were ethnic Lithuanians. Russians were the second largest ethnic group, with 8.9 percent of the population, and Poles were next with 7.3 percent.

Letters in Pravda

Pravda, the Communist Party newspaper, has been running letters from citizens elsewhere in the country expressing concern about Lithuania's moves toward independence.

Today Pravda ran an unusually long dispatch, billed as a "subjective" report, by its correspondent Yuri Shabanov. It sensitively described the feelings of ostracism an ethnic Russian reporter experienced in a republic bent on throwing off the Russian yoke, but concluded that Sajudis was dictating anti-Soviet positions to the Lithuanian Parliament and that Mr. Landsbergis was trying to dictate to Moscow, too.

Yuri Bandura wrote in Moscow News, one of the few newspapers independent of Government or Communist Party control in Moscow: "Official Moscow reports on the Lithuanian

Moscow reverts to its one-sided style in covering the Baltics.

situation generally have a dry, tough and exacting tone," That newspaper, too, was critical of the way Mr. Landsbergis and his Lithuanian Government have handled the situation, with a series of what it described as unilateral ultimatums to Moscow.

Tankred Golenpolsky, editor of a new independent publication, the Newsletter of European Soviet Culture, said "independence" in the press here was still a relative thing.

In Vilnius, Soviet armed forces seized the printing plant where the main Lithuanian independence newspapers are printed more than a week ago, but so far have not stopped them from coming out.

Editor's Ouster Stopped

In a case of attempted interference on the national level last year, Mr. Gorbachev tried to dismiss the editor of the country's most popular critical journal, Argumenty i Fakty. But buoyed by support from his staff, the editor, Vladislav A. Starkov, stood fast.

As the Communist Party newspaper, Pravda has no such claim to independence, and a resolution published in it on Saturday made clear that the party's view of what the role of the press should be had not really changed since Lenin's day. Pravda should support the party line by printing the truth and only the truth, it said, and help to make it the avant-garde of Soviet society — something prescribed by law in the Soviet Constitution until the party decided in February to relinquish the right to be the country's leading force.

The resolution said that all the country's news organizations should lead an active fight against "nationalism and chauvinism in all its forms," meaning, in the narrow sense, the kind of nationalism that led Lithuania to proclaim its independence.